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ISSUES WHICH IMPACT ON PHYSICALLY DISABLED PERSONS

BACKGROUND

This brief was prepared with input from consumers, consumer groups, service delivery groups, a parent of a disabled child and the wife of a person with a disability. Information was received from northern and southern Albberta. Involvement was sought from consumers and people representing consumers in the physically disabled, deaf and visually impaired communities. We tried to have a wide cross section of people involved who had varied experiences.

PROCESS

Discussions took place in person, when possible, and by telephone. Suggestions from the north and south were received in writing following telephone communications.

When the issues were tabulated, the committee Chairman met with the Co-Chairman of the Man-In-Motion committee to present and review the issues. A summary draft of the issues was prepared and circulated to all people who provided input for their review and comments.

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EDMONTON

After discussion with the groups involved, a summary of the issues was forwarded to the Premier, relevant ministers, the community representatives and Mr. Rick Hansen.

Mr. Premier, the issues presented below reflect the concern of disabled persons living in Alberta and their representative groups. We understand that Mr. Hansen will later present issues which are of concern to him and the Man-In-Motion world tour.

It is our hope that by summarizing the issues, we will provide a focus for discussion during this meeting.

ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED

1. DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION

   Alberta must continue its commitment to reduce the need for institutional beds by:

   (a) maintaining and improving current levels of support provided under the Alberta Aids to Daily Living Program and the Handicapped Children's Services Program.

   (b) the implementation of a comprehensive personal support and home care service to enable disabled persons to reside in a residence of choice and maintain a maximum level of independence. This program must be universal in nature and based on the consumers physical need for services. It should not be based on financial needs or assets or require a medical entry.

2. ASSURED INCOME FOR THE SEVERELY HANDICAPPED

The Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped legislation needs to be more clearly defined so consumers and administrators understand all the components and avenues of the program. As it now exists, two people with similar disabilities going to different workers may not get the same answers about who is eligible for the program. One may receive AISH benefits while the other is denied. Existing incentives must be maintained and additional incentives should be added which would encourage persons with disabilities to become employable.

3. ACCESSIBILITY

Alberta must continue to improve, broaden and enforce Section 3.7 of the Alberta Building Code to ensure that all Albertans have access to the goods and services in our community. We must make it mandatory for developers to designate an appropriate percentage of parking for disabled persons and we must find ways to stimulate innovative barrier free design in all buildings.

4. TRANSPORTATION

Transportation should be available within and between urban and rural areas in close proximity. For example, Sherwood

Park and Edmonton should each have transportation in their community but there should also be transportation between the two communities. The same would be true for Taber and Lethbridge.

5. EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Disabled persons and their representative groups find it extremely difficult to understand and access the fragmented services available for their education and training.

The provincial government must press for continued improvement in its negotiations with the federal government with respect to the Vocational Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons Agreement, with greater emphasis on:

(a) more flexibility in the interpretation of the program regarding the provision of technical aids, personal support services, accommodation, etc.

(b) a more realistic approach in determining which educational and training programs are eligible for funding; and far greater participation by the individuals themselves in their career planning.

(c) recognition of the potential of high technology to provide disabled persons with opportunities for education and employment.

5. COMMUNITY COORDINATION AND AWARENESS

Physically disabled persons and their families must be able to acquire the knowledge about the availability of equipment and services and how to access both. There must be better coordination between hospitals and the community before discharge so persons with disabilities do not end up in the community totally unaware of the services and equipment available to them.

6. SPORTS, RECREATION, LEISURE AND FITNESS

Persons with disabilities must have access to fully equipped facilities which promote sport, participation and fitness. These facilities must have trained people who recognize the differences and similarities of persons who are disabled so that good fitness programs can be designed for all people who have a desire to become fit. Training programs must also be available for those who want to be competitive in sport.

The educational system must ensure that all students are able to take part in the physical education programs in all schools. Physically disabled youth must have the opportunity to participate in these programs as well as academic programs. People who are fit often are more productive and live longer healthier lives. Where better to start than with our youth.

Traditionally, Alberta produces a number of high calibre disabled athletes. Because sport, in general, receives a low funding priority and sport for disabled persons even lower priority, it is difficult for these athletes to train and compete at the national and international levels. We must ensure that all our athletes have equal access to funding which will allow them to bring recognition and esteem to our province.

RECOMMENDATION

It is the intention of the committee to identify not only problems and concerns but to offer potential solutions. If these solutions are to work, we must all recognize the need to address the following:

(a) Fragmentation of service delivery by government and the voluntary sectors alike.

(b) The need for government to involve disabled persons and their representative groups in planning programs, policies and regulations which impact on their lives.

We believe that a commitment by the Government of Alberta to establish a Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons would be a positive first step toward the resolution of those concerns.

We would therefore submit for your approval that the objectives of the Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons shall be as follows:

1. Advise the Premier on matters related to the status of disabled persons.

2. Advise the Premier and make recommendations on all policy related issues concerning the status of disabled persons.

3. Bring before the Government and the public, matters of interest and concern to disabled persons.

4. Promote prevention of disabling conditions.

5. Promote employment opportunities for disabled persons.

6. Promote the re-integration of disabled persons back into the community.

7. Promote access of disabled persons to all services offered to the citizens of Alberta.

Mr. Premier, we appreciate the opportunity you and Mr. Hansen have provided for us to bring to your attention, in a positive

manner, issues which impact on the lives of disabled Albertans, and we believe that if we forge a strong partnership and plan together for the future, we will all see Rick Hansen's dream come true.

Thank you very much.

PARTICIPANTS REPRESENTING DISABLED PERSONS AT PREMIER'S MEETING

Rick Hansen:

Representing Man-In-Motion World tour

Gary McPherson: (Disabled Consumer)

Chairman of Alberta Organizing Committee, Man In Motion and Executive Director of the Alberta Northern Lights Wheelchair Basketball Society and President of Canadian Wheelchair Sports Association. Both organizations are committed to the development of high quality sports, recreation, and leisure time activities for disabled persons.

Eric Boyd: (Disabled Consumer)

Co-Chairman of Alberta Organizing Committee, Man In Motion and Executive Director of Canadian Paraplegic Association, Alberta Division. The Association provides extensive rehab counselling services to spinal cord injured Albertans.

Jim Killick: (Disabled Consumer)

Executive Director of Easter Seal Ability Council (formerly Alberta Rehabilitation Council for the Disabled) whose primary objectives are to provide assistance to all physically disabled Albertans, both children and adults, whether disabled by injury, congenital illness or neurological disorder through a number of programs including equipment provision, residential options, recreation programs, and community development. The Council administers and conducts the annual Easter Seal and Ability Fund Campaigns.

Diane Earl: (Disabled Consumer)

Chairman of the Subcommittee to develop brief for Premier's meeting and Chairperson of the Paralympic Sports Association, whose mandate is to provide sports and recreational activities for disabled persons and develops coaches and trainers in conjunction with the Alberta Wheelchair Sports Association.

Nancie Krushelnicki:

Executive Director, Alberta Committee of Disabled Consumers whose mandate is to improve the quality of lifestyles of persons with disabilities through educational and positive policy changes at all levels of government and society on the fundamental basis of consumerism and social justice.

Irence Fieke:

Charirperson of Coalition of Provincial Organizations of the Handicapped, whose opbjective is to provide all persons with disabilities with a voice of their own, ensuring that they have the same rights as all canadians, and equal access to all systems, whether federal, provincal or municipal.

Bill McKeown:

Executive Director, C.N.I.B., Alberta Division whose objectives include the provision of a broad range of counselling services for blind persons and, in general, ameliorates the condition of blind persons and to promote sight enhancement.

Len Mitchell: (Disabled Consumer)

President, Alberta Association of the Deaf, whose primary objectives include acting as a resource to the deaf, hard of hearing, their families and the general public in areas relating to hearing loss.

Abigail Parrish-Craig:

The wife of a quadriplegic man and a Rehabilitation Counsellor with the Canadian Paraplegic Association, Alberta Division.

Dick Varga: (Disabled Consumer)

Executive Director of the Citizens Resource Centre in Lethbridge whose two major functions are:

1. To ensure that handicapped people are able to receive information, advise and help as to services available in the area.

2. To act as an advisory committee to the Minister of Social Services in regard to needs and potential of disabled persons.

Donna Boychuk:

Parent of a handicapped child and a Rehabilitation Counsellor with the Canadian Paraplegic Association, Alberta Division, Grande Prairie District Office.

Debbie Steadward:

President of Alberta Section, Canadian Wheelchair Sports Association.